

Center for Modern Greek Studies
Greek American Oral History Project
Transcription

Tape:

Subject: Virginia Lagiss
Interviewer: Elana Vlahandreas
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Transcriber: Amanda Cookson
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I: Interviewer

V: Virginia

Counter: 000

I: //three, Mrs. Virginia Kyriazi {001} Lagiss. My name is Elana Vlahandreas, I'm interviewing Mrs. Virginia Lagiss and this is March 2003. Well, first I guess we could identify you and I'll just start with a question, Mrs. Lagiss, in your beautiful home in Woodside, California. What leads you to consider yourself to, umm to be of Greek heritage?

V: Well my mother was from Polis, Greece. My father was from the island of Skopylos and I was born in Benetia, California in 1916, April 27th. My father came over as a very young boy, uhh at about 14. There was about a hundred or more Greek fisherman, just as {009} between San Francisco and Sacramento. However, he, he tested fishing until he found a job in a little town of Venetia working in a creamery and he learned how to make butter <mumbling> {012}. He married my mother, would come over, and hers is a very unique story. Would you like to hear some more?

I: Sure and the name of the butter creamery, do you know it?//

V: Ileson Creamery Company {013} and when it was absorbed by Golden State in San Francisco my father was {014} to move to the big city in San Francisco. So we stayed in Benetia.

I: Right.

V: And then we found other work to do, did very well, ended up buying a Victorian house, still there, it's a monument now. And <coughs> my mother's story is, as well as

my uhh three uncles and they had come over to build boats for fishermen because my maternal grandfather had a boat building shop in {018} Greece. They convinced my grandmother and my grandfather who was 62 at the time and my grandmother younger to come to California. My grandmother had had about 11 children and at that time there were five or six living. She umm decided that maybe with all these men there she'd find a couple of husbands for her daughters. So she brought, my aunt was 9, my mother was older, and uhh she brought her younger son. So they came to Benetia and my grandmother almost had a nervous breakdown because she felt these men were not eligible. Later, in 1969 when I went to {025} I saw her house, it was quite nice, her little bungalow and she did have lentils in the backyard and my grandfather had a nice little business. So they wanted to go back to Greece, my uncle told them that was impossible so they bought her a twenty dollar gold piece to wear at her neck to uhh help her assimilate into the community <laughing>. There were only three other Greek families that had children, all the rest were single males.

I: Really. And the date of her departure from Greece?

V: The date of her departure?

I: Yeah.

V: Umm//

I: //Around.

V: I don't know, honey, probably about 1914.

I: Ok.

V: And then she found my father, was working in the creamery company, so she thought he was eligible for my mother and that was an arranged wedding. And my father's six foot three and a half, I think he was, and he was light complected, blonde hair, blue eyes and my mother was a redhead. And my uncles on my mother's side were all redheads so people would say to me, you know, "You're not Greek," <laughing> cuz my sister and I were towheads.

I: And the family names of your uncles and//

V: //Well my grandmother and grandfather's last name was Delinches or Delenches {038}. The name still exists, I have cousins with that name.

I: Ok.

V: Of course my father's name was {039} Kyriatzi and umm my paternal grandfather, of course, {040} on the island of Skopylos in a very tiny mountain village

called {041}. So my mother and father were, met here in the States, which I thought was interesting.

I: Mmhmm.

V: And then uh they were married here.

I: Ok. How did they arrive, through Ellis Island?

V: Very, yes. Umm in those days umm the trains came from Chicago and New York and came across the plains all the way to California. The train stopped in Benetia and then they were broken up into three sections and put on to the world's longest train ferry taken fifteen minutes over to Porta Costa {047} and then down to the Oakland Bowl and then one to the boat to get to San Francisco, Oakland to San Francisco.

I: Oakland Mole?

V: They called it, we called it the Mole, M-O-L-E. I don't know, all the trains came in there.

I: Ok.

V: And people left the train, went on board uh going to get to San Francisco.

I: Ok.

V: So what I'm saying is that they came across the plains//

I: //Mmm. And uh//

V: //an interesting thing is when my father died, my mother was a citizen because anyone who married umm a citizen would automatically become a citizen, that was before 1921, the law has since changed. But when, after my father died I said to my mother, "Where are your papers?" They gave to a citizen and she said, {055} <in Greek> So I thought to myself what is the Kastikari {056} I thought it was some big building in Greece or something.

I: Mmhmm.

V: So it turns out it was umm Ellis Island. Umm they said Kastikari because some people thought it was the Coast Guard and that's not true. When I went to Ellis Island I found that out that <laughing> when one came from the boat from Ellis Island into Manhattan they had to come through a fort that was, that's named Clinton Fort. And as they came out of the fort there was a big garden. So it was actually the Coast Garden//

I: //crazy//

V: //they called it Kastikari.

I: And was your mother literate as in//

V: //My mother spoke two languages because we were told that in the house we spoke Greek, outside we spoke American, which I distinguish from English. My mother's two languages were Greek, uhh Greek and broken English.

I: Mmhmm. Ohh. So hence the marriage takes place. Umm your parents.

V: Well the way marriages were done back then I have a picture, I'll show it to you later of my mother in her wedding gown and of my father. Umm they were always had to go down to San Francisco, as I told you, they very important that train. Train, excuse me, that stopped in Benicia from Chicago and New York and then they were taken all the way to San Francisco so they were married in a Greek church in San Francisco. That's the old Greek church, not the Annunciation. Yeah, and umm//

I: //What street.

V: Pardon me?

I: What street was it on?

V: The name of the church was called Holy Trinity.

I: Ok.

V: Umm it still exists but it doesn't belong to any Greek people.

I: Oh ok.

V: I think Father Kostoulis built a big church out of <mumbling> {074}.

I: Ok.

V: So my mother and father married. I have four siblings, I have two brothers: {075}, Gus, and then of course my sister uhh died when she was 35 of cancer but her name was Andromache. We called her, in Greek mache as in English, May. The four of us.

I: Who's there, who, where, where are you, the eldest, youngest?

V: Eldest second, my brother {078} is older than I.

I: Ok.

V: And then I'm second and then I have a brother, uhh sister, I have a sister and then my brother, Gus. So the three of us are still living.

I: Ok. And//

V: //But I wanted to tell you something interesting about uhh Benecia.

I: I was just going to say your settlement in Benecia. Anything you want//

V: //Benecia was very famous as an educ-, they called it the Athens, uhh of Greece. Uhh actually the Athens in Calif-, California because there were institutions there. Mills College started there.

I: Ohh ok.

V: The Hastings Mansion is still there but the McKay Mansion and a few others where they made money in the silver, Virginia City, uhh those have been torn down. So umm, it was a very important town. <coughing> The umm, there was a big arsenal, and there still is an arsenal there but they're not using it.

I: Yeah.

V: But then there was St. Catherine's Academy and Greek people, somehow or other that had to send their children away to school would send them to St. Catherine's Academy. And, and so umm.

I: Private.

V: And umm my first year of school was at the St. Catherine's//

I: //Ok//

V: //and umm I went into the public school the next year.

I: Second grade?

V: But public school in Benecia.

I: Second grade?

V: Oh, yes.

I: Ok

V: And umm my sister and I had almost light hair so we were called towheads. And umm the umm, as I said, there were only three families with children. So they kept up the Greek traditions, which was my sister and I were taught to serve something when people came in, something sweet and a glass of water. And then they would have their get-togethers and then people, Greek people from Vallejo came over to visit. So they, they had their little life and then my father had a car and once in while we would go to San Francisco. In those days you went about 45 miles an hour so it was a long haul to go to San Francisco to church for communion.

I: Was there a bridge?

V: The, the bridge? I'm sorry.

I: Oh ferry boat or bridge?

V: Oh, no, what, what way we did, we went through uhh Vallejo and took the Monticello ferry to get down to Richmond and then uhh all the way down to San Francisco.

I: Did your mother drive?

V: No.

I: Oh. <laughing>

V: My father drove.

I: Uh huh. What were the ethnic customs of your parents//

V: //uh uh//

I: //we know//

V: //my parents, my parents gave, kept the Greek customs in the house.

I: Ok.

V: Or his own Greek cusoms, however, what was unique in my life is that my father was athletically inclined//

I: //Ok//

V: //and he wanted us to be as good in athletics as we were academically. He never wanted us to get into trouble, he said that he'd always hear about if we got into trouble. Now, unfortunately, as long as there was a school teacher with they could do anything they want to so I played competitive tennis and I played competitive basketball//

I: //Uh huh//

V: //And uh my father was proud of that. He was also proud when he heard me as the valedictorian from San Francisco State at the Opera House. In the old days when there weren't many students, they had graduation at the San Francisco Opera House.

I: Ohhh.

V: So I was graduated in 1938.

I: From Benicia High School?

V: No, '34 from Benicia High School, 1938 from San Francisco State.

I: Ok.

V: Which was then a teacher's college and very strict, strict teacher's college.

I: San Francisco State was?

V: Absolutely.

I: Ohh. Well//

V: //we had to pass tests and you had to know exactly what you were doing to get a credential.

I: And did it, was the campus at the same address?

V: No, it's out of Buchanan Street.

I: Buchanan.

V: And I remember my supervisor, I, I guess I was a natural teacher because uh three of us were assigned to what they called Frederick Burke School. In those days, Frederick Burke uh had, was known because one could be in the sixth grade but studying ninth grade math and history, English or combination of things. So umm three of us were assigned to teach in the classroom, my supervisor Mr. Scozio {121}, I'll never forget her. I had been ill uh with a cold, so I came in late and when I came in I heard that each teacher was supposed to teach for a week and the other two would observe her. So when I came in <laughing> I was observing this, one of the other two, telling this young man who was on top of the cloak closet, "Now you get down now, get down now." I couldn't stand it, I walked over to him and I, I don't know what made me say it, I guess God did, I said, "Get down right now or you'll be expelled!" <laughing> Later I found

out the reason he came down so fast and behaved himself was he had been expelled from 12 schools.

I: Right.

V: So I enjoy teaching, very much.

I: Now//

V: //I majored in two subjects, English with a stress on grammar and composition and Physical Education because Greek people believed in a sound mind and in a sound body and I've always believed that, that working hard and staying healthy//

I: //Mmm. Let's go to your spouse. How did you meet?

V: How did we meet?

I: Mmhmm.

V: We had been in a wedding uhh party, Sarah Millen's {134} wedding in San Francisco and uhh in our late teens and I went to teach school in Pittsburgh, California.

I: Oh.

V: Ok, but I played a lot of tennis. In those days, girls there weren't many girls playing tennis so <coughs> and we played at night for 25 cents an hour for the electricity. I would be called by two, two other fellas or three other fellas to come and play tennis. In those days, we didn't walk by ourselves in town. My roommate {140} and I would go together to the tennis courts at the park. So umm when we come back we would stop to get a coca-cola and uhh Jim recognized me and so he came in and said hello and said, "Do you remember me?" And I said, "Yes, I remember you from the wedding." <coughing> So we, he said, "Well what should we do?" And I said, "Well we're playing tennis." So he said, "What? I'll play tennis with you." And I said, "Fine." So we made a date and {145} and I walked up to the tennis courts and we met him up there. And <coughs> I thought he really knew how to play tennis <laughing> well I had been taught to know the wind blows this way, that way, you spin your racquet to see who's gonna serve first. And now I thought, well I'll remember what my coach always told me. Win all your serves and break through one, if you're opponents and you've got the game 6-4. Well he couldn't hit the ball, every one went over the fence. And then I thought to myself, now what do I do, do I lose a boyfriend?

I: Hmm.

V: By beating him? Or do I lose to let him be my boyfriend? So it turned out that I, I won 6-love.

I: <laughing>

V: So then what did he do? He called and he came the next week, they lady where we boarded didn't have a phone.

I: It's a boarding house in San Francisco?//

V: //Yeah, no, and the lady where we boarded in Pittsburgh//

I: //Pittsburgh//

V: //it was six of us girls that lived there//

I: //Mmhmm k.

V: //We all taught school, we all walked to school, nobody had a car, this was 1940, 1930, 1940.

I: Ok.

V: And umm so Jim came up and said well he had a friend that wanted to play against me. So umm we arranged for Carl and his wife, they were married, Jim to meet us at the tennis court. So we went there and {159} was with me and umm Jim {160} Jim watched and I beat him 6-2 <laughing> So I later I found out he had taken bets on the {161}. <laughing> It was a lot of fun.

I: Did you umm choose the teaching now, you were making a living teaching, with a of salary for your teaching?

V: Yes. Our salaries in 1940 were \$125 a month, with no {165}, no health insurance, no nothing. But we had 6:30 every day and every night, I played tennis about two nights a week and every other night was all kinds of homework. And of course, umm I had a drama class and then I also did a play for the community and I was very busy all the time. I also taught some folk dancing one night a week.

I: Is there a community playhouse in Pittsburgh?

V: Uhh yes. Uhh it was all adult people <mumbling> {171} So I did that for the first couple years.

I: The production was other American//

V: Uhh the produc-, the production was umm, I'm trying to think of some of the names. They're, they were popular plays in those days. But you were asking me about salary.

I: Yeah.

V: So let's go back to that for a minute. All my life I had worked towards bettering things, not only for myself but for others. And so we worked very hard to get uhh three day sick leave, it finally came into the States. Uhh with \$125, in those days I was able to help my sister go to {179} School <mumbling>

I: Great.

V: And I was also able to do other things at that time. I didn't have a car. Umm in those days, most, most women married for security. It was not like today at all. So I came through a period of transition where things began to change. Women, they got to go into careers. And I think that the war in 1942 did help a lot to bring women out because all the best teachers had been moved. For instance, English teachers, Social Studies teachers, Math teachers went to work for Kaiser in the Richmond shipyard. And so they were making twice as much.

I: Ok.

V: But gradually things began to pull through. Women went to work in the airplane factories <mumbling> So umm there was an awful lot happening after the war.

I: Yeah.

V: In Benicia when I was a young girl going to school, teachers would not <mumbling> teachers would not continue teaching if they were married. Or if they were married they were not hired. In Pittsburgh, California uhh if one taught the first day of the fourth year, she would then become permanent and she could not lose her job unless she was taken to court <mumbling>. That is still true. However, the school board in Pittsburgh would say to the teacher at the end of the third year, "You go teach in Antioch, California." And one of those girls had come down here {199}. And umm, and uhh when you teach up there for a year you can come back here. So uhh none of them became permanent.

I: Ah!

V: <mumbling> So I was one of the very first ones to become permanent because umm the war and because teachers were leaving to go to Kaiser and uhh was asked to become a perman-, I became a permanent teacher. And then I got married.

I: Did you bring the subject up or did they just suggest to you that you could become permanent?

V: The superintendent came to the apartment where I lived with Jim and, and said, "We really need to..." They were short of teachers! <laughing> Not because I was something terrific on my part but that was, teachers were leaving, they were making

twice as much money in an airplane factory in the Kaiser shipyard and the whole new ballgame for teachers.

I: What were//

V: //for women too.

I: Yeah.

V: Cuz I know that later on umm maybe I'm getting ahead of my story, but when I was married, you know with three, uhh and then I had children, uhh I stayed home for nine years to make sure that they were well taken care of and then I, they were never left alone, they were all in school together. And uhh before I went in, back into school I said to my husband, "I have an invitation to teach in, in {216} in Palo Alto High School." They were having a lot of problems. And umm I was called by a superintendent that had known about me at San Francisco State and umm my husband, of course, would say, ever so temperate, "Well, you really should stay home, you don't need to go to work." But I would say, "Look, I have a career and I promise you that everything will be well taken in the home, children will be well cared for and you're number one and I'll go back and see how it's like." And that's how I got back into Palo Alto.

I: Let's see about your marriage and your engagement, like it sounds like it was right during World War II.

V: Well my husband, one time, before he was my husband <laughing> said to me, "Well you have to come down and meet the family." They live in Fort Chicago which is uh just a few miles from Pittsburgh.

I: Ok.

V: So I said, "Well I have to bring {228}." And he said, "Fine," and said, "You know, we're going to have pheasant quail." And I said, "I know a little bit about hunting, my father hunted," I said, "how do you, how are you so sure that you're gonna kill a pheasant." <laughing> He said, "I will." Anyway, uhh he came up and picked up {232} and me, went down to his home and his mother and father came to the door and his mother started talking Greek {234} cuz she's a brunette and English to me.

I: Ohh.

V: So we all, {235} and I looked at each other and we started laughing. So then finally I spoke up in Greek and they were a little bit shocked cuz they hadn't seen a blonde Greek before.

I: Ohh//

V: //and that's how I met the family.

I: Ok.

V: And then of course, uhh we were married in 1941.

I: Ok//

V: //and that was interesting too because my mother-in-law had the old traditions of southern Greece where she wanted to have the engagement party and the, and the umm, umm Greece {241} dresses and all this. I didn't even know that, that was a tradition. Did you know about it?

I: No.

V: Was a tradition to have a breast-, uhh betrothed I guess you call it. But my aunt in San Francisco, and my mother are quite modern. My aunt and my mother both encouraged me to <mumbling> and so did my father. And uhh then I went to college, got my credential. So uhh we were married but umm Jim had to report to a service into the war and what happened was that umm I was probably the first Greek girl in those days to be married in a suit. <laughing> Cuz we didn't have time to have a big wedding, furthermore there wasn't too much money. And uhh my aunt had a dinner party for 45 people and my <mumbling> L-O-U-K-E-S. He was like the, he was a priest at Annunciation and he was able to umm bring order into the congregation and keep the children from running around the church and all. Very prominent pastor.

I: I guess it was//

V: //and then my mother-in-law//

I: //the Greek school, after school for you//

V: //I don't know of any Greek school at that time.

I: No. Just learned it in the house and you knew getting married that your husband would be involved in the service//

V: //yeah//

I: //draft or//

V: //yeah and the interesting thing is I told him, I said, "When you go to be inducted," I said, "Uhh don't go in the Navy because they're sinking all the ships."

I: <laughing>

V: Which was very true.

I: Really.

V: So I remember he came back and he said he signed up for the army but they had asked him, "Why do you wanna go in the army and not the navy?" And he said, "Well I have a very good shot." Which is what shotgun and rifle. And uhh they said, "What do you think we'd use you in the navy?" <laughing> "We use shotguns and rifles in the navy too." <laughing> Anyway, he joined the army and he was such a good teacher that he uhh trained in a group, every seven weeks he had new groups down in Camp Roberts, southern California.

I: Probably training//

V: //So he came to say goodbye to me three times and every time he'd call back and say that he wasn't going overseas. So umm uhh he escaped some of that but he did work very hard.

I: Teaching in//

V: //yeah, well, see what they did, they had to walk for five miles, twenty miles, twenty five miles in their packs, and they taught them how to shoot and all that sorta thing.

I: Umm probably shooting and physical training.

V: Physical training. He went through it every step <mumbling>

I: Ahh and where at Camp Roberts?

V: Camp Roberts is down in uhh Pasa Robos {277}.

I: Beautiful.

V: And then by the way, umm in those days, we had rationing or rationing and the teachers once a month would stop teaching until we would get our platoon box. So umm the people the community would come and there would be a thousand pounds of butter a month. Five pounds of sugar, et cetera. And this is because of the war effort, our food had to be sent to our boys and girls. Also, uhh vaseline rations and so {285} I used to go on the bus to Camp Roberts, stay with my aunt and then she'd put us on the bus, uhh two others girls and I, our place on the, we'd go down in, onto the bus and ride, you know, right down to {290}, at which they overnight and come right back it would be about {291}. So finally I go to the car and umm my brake and I knew was very kind, would always put five gallons of gas in the trunk of my car in case I ran out of gas.

I: Ok.

V: Cuz I was only allowed five gallons.

I: Rations.

V: It was a quite a war effort.

I: Back to the present. When you had dinner at his parent's house was there a pheasant on the table?

V: There was pheasants and doves and all the raviolis that my mother-in-law learned to make from the China lady next door.

I: <laughing>

V: And all that is uhh, the siblings, there was four boys and two girls in the family. They were all neatly dressed and everybody's seated around a great big family table. In those days, Greek people had big family tables because when I was a little girl in Benicia we always had people at least once or twice a month from San Francisco came to Benicia and visit all these <mumbling> {305} //

I: //and//

V: //But there was a lot of comaraderie, you know, there wasn't television so people made an effort to go see others.

I: Yeah.

V: Doors were not locked.

I: Do you have, uhh extended family from your childhood? Were there many southern Greece relatives from your mom's//

V: //Umm I had umm one uncle who baptized me and of course, he went back to Hot Springs, Arkansas where he had a restaurant. But I have uhh a first cousin there {313} and that's about it. I have some cousins here on my uhh mother's side but uhh that's about it.

I: Yeah.

V: Everybody's going on.

I: I see. And the village of your mother and the village of your father.

V: Ohh ok, my mother lived in {318} which she was exposed to more of the world than my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law lived at the foot of a mountain in Arcadia, outside of Tripoli.

I: Ok.

V: Alright. My mother was at a seaport//

I: //Mmhmm//

V: //And I always feel that seaport people learn more about the world. My mother had uh up to the sixth grade or seventh grade Greek education. Umm my mother-in-law didn't. Umm so my mother in {326} had been exposed to an awful lot more so when she and my aunt came here they were more with a few of the women in San Francisco again the '30s and the '40s and '50s. Umm there were some women in San Francisco who were very progressive. For example, {331} umm she was, she spoke beautiful Greek and beautiful English and she organized {333} and {333} was a forerunner of Philoptochos.

I: Ok.

V: And so these women and not only that but they learned American slang really fast.

I: Ok.

V: And I remember I went to Mrs. Scopis's {336} house and she had her body, she would even have fancy letter. Uhh they all read books and looked at pictures and they kept up with the, uhh integrating Americans menus with the Greek ones.

I: What's fancy letter?

V: Fancy letter.

I: What is it?

V: Ohhhh. What they did they took a scoop of butter and then rolled into little wooden boards and made it look like a porcupine or something, a pineapple. <laughing> <coughing>

I: Somebody in your family was butter, from the butter industry.

V: Yeah, that was my father.

I: So that was//

V: //my father as a young boy learned how to make butter and then after several years he became the chief butter tester so he had a very good job and was able to buy a very nice home for his family and buy a car. So uhh, umm and as I told you earlier umm I think I mentioned that he did not go with Golden State Motor Company in San

Francisco. And like what happened there, he belonged to the independent auto {352} <mumbling> so he was not allowed to work for very long. It, he, he umm, in those days <mumbling> had to have what they called Work Progress Administration, the WPA//

I: //Yes//

V: //and people were subsidized by the government to umm to be able to get a job, low rates, but his friends who knew him in the organization to belong to and he learned English very well, he was even a secretary to the uhh {360} and got him a job up in the Benicia Arsenal inspecting guns. And I'll never forget November 11, 1941 umm Roosevelt declared war and I was with my mother and dad and he was called to work to deliver ships, send the guns over to uhh Pearl Harbor.

I: November 11th.

V: November 11th.

I: After Pearl Harbor then.

V: Yes <mumbling>

I: Oh se-, ahh, ok//

V: <mumbling> {370}

I: Ses-, September, September.

V: November 11th, I'm pretty sure that's right. I may have made a mistake.

I: Yeah, uhh//

V: //with the dates//

I: //Well they probably were able to load the ships at shore//

V: //Well, well they were loading the ships in Benicia, from the Benicia Arsenal where they had put guns together.

I: Did you have blackouts at night?

V: Yes there were blackouts//

END OF SIDE A {377}

SIDE B {000}

V: Uhh he believed in the women being the right hand of the church and when they organized Philoptochos then the women dropped their organization and went into umm the umm Philoptochos. So that was in San Francisco at the Annunciation Church.

I: About uhh what year do you think {003} uhh dissolved?

V: Umm early 1930s//

I: //Uh huh//

V: //uhh excuse me, late 1930's//

I: //Uh huh//

V: //cuz they were functioning in 1935.

I: Oh so starting in the 30's to '35 <mumbling> starting in the 30's to 1935. Women, women's group.

V: Well these, these women in San Francisco who were remarkable, they, they were {006} that was my aunt, Mrs., her name was Katherine in English and, and umm uhh several women whose husbands were doctors and, they really came out and participating in uhh charity//

I: //Mmhmm//

V: //Which I thought was great.

I: Mmhmm.

V: A good beginning.

I: Mmhmm. Was it//

V: //I tell you what, there's a woman by the name of Amanda {009}, her mother was umm uhh uhh {10} and uhh she has remembered all these things that her mother did.

I: And these were charities for benefiting uhh Greek uhh//

V: //Greek people//

I: //Greek people. Ok.

V: Yeah, yeah cuz I remember during the war when my mother and umm the others were sending boxes and boxes of clothing to Greece and all the villages there because the people didn't have anything.

I: Uh huh.

V: So that was during the war and right after the war.

I: Uh huh.

V: And, and people were hungry for clothes. I know of one funny situation where umm one of the women said, "Well if you want the boxes to arrive there put one shoe in one box and another shoe in another one. <laughing> Then they won't be stolen."

I: Ohh! Ohh.

V: Cuz people were really starving for things.

I: Ohh I see now.

V: I know when I went Greece in 1967 and I went out for my grand-, my umm mother-in-laws village which was outside of umm Tripoli in the southern part that umm uhh {019} I asked them what they did with all the beautiful clothes that came from the States and they said they took them down into the main town//

I: //Mmhmm//

V: //from the village, they would take them to the main town and they would exchange them for sugar//

I: //Oh//

V: //and wheat, flour, staples that they needed to buy.

I: Good. Ok uhh this umm this charity group would pack used clothing, it was all used right?

V: All used clothing but in good condition, excellent condition.

I: Uh huh. Wha//

V: //their program all fit in with the Skouras Brothers {024} from Los Angeles who had ships that were loaded with merchandise for the uhh Greek people. Skouras Brothers were the people who had the theatres in Los Angeles.

I: Yeah. So they went from shipping to movies?

V: Uh huh.

I: I can't spell uhh. And then that family is still around in Los Angeles area?

V: Well there is umm, they're all members of that family but not very many.

I: Oh. Uhh what did you get, what instruments did you get for \$25 when you had your//

V: //Well we had, well I was trying to think, it's a very small uhh metal piece that sound like a drum. And it had uhh, I dunno, and then there was a skymolo which was umm an S-K-Y-M-O-L-O I think. Uhh I'm not sure about the spelling but it was a stringed instrument that had up on a stand and a man would hit it with a {033} cup, tips, sticks and then umm I had those two.

I: Mmhmm.

V: And then there was umm, I think I had somebody that had a {034} and of course you have to remember this was way back in 1937 or so.

I: Mmhmm.

V: And uhh then Mrs. {035} was a singer, she sang all the popular Greek songs and I tried to explain to my audience that there was a mournful sound, the minor sound. I also explained to them that some of the songs may have come from, umm Gibraltar, or to Spain and then over to Greece {038}. Anyway, I did all my research, it was historical. And it was well accepted and I got an 'A' for it.

I: Where did you get, where did you find the information for your research?

V: Oh I did it at the school library. We had a very good school, yeah. So I went into historical books and then I also went to the city library in San Francisco. I was always going to the library, I was always collecting National Geographics. <laughing>

I: Did Mrs., Mrs. {042} have any professional singing background or//

V: //that I don't know but she was always singing in, in homes and in those days when we went to visit, I went with my aunt and uncle. Umm they, they would sing after dinner, they would sing.

I: Yeah.

V: And that was their entertainment and they all joined in regardless of their voices.

I: Yeah.

V: And then of course they played poker.

I: Yeah, yeah. Did the women play?

V: The women played poker, you'd better believe it!

I: Two different tables?

V: They had uh tables for women, tables for men.

I: I know.

V: In the private homes.

I: Yeah. For money?

V: Umm I don't know whether they played for money, if it was money it was very minuscule.

I: Mmhmm. It was an after dinner activity.

V: An after dinner entertainment.

I: Uh huh. How long did these umm these music umm venues last where you put on this//

V: //Oh I just did one big program.

I: Oh what was//

V: //I did that for my credits.

I: Ok.

V: We had a choice of doing umm presenting a performance. It had to, was related to umm folk dance and uh ethnic music and that's why I was able to choose that one.

I: And did they record it or was there any//

V: //I don't remember, we had a teacher by the name of Mrs. Bandenburg {055}, she was very strict but <coughing> I met her years later and she said she always remembered the program I did.

I: Beautiful//

V: //<mumbling> she said it was a very lovely program.

I: Really. And uh she was strict with umm uh a hard grader?

V: Yes, ma'am//

I: //Uhh//

V: //she was//

I: //and you got an 'A.'

V: I did. I also wanted to tell ya that later on when I was studying in college, I wanted to tell you a little bit about the Greek men of my father's age at that time. First of all, I'm gonna backtrack.

I: Fine, that's fine//

V: //<mumbling> Titus played uhh hardball, baseball. I was center, center field and relief pitcher. And uhh with, from Benicia uhh we were going to go to Vallejo and the woman teacher came to get us and there were two {063} of girls and in those days umm we wore some old pants. We didn't have the regular uhh jeans that they have today. So a man came from Vallejo and he said to my father, he had seen me playing baseball and that he shouldn't allow me to do that anymore because the sailors from there island in Vallejo would look at the girls. And so the next week when I, the carloads came to pick me up at our home, my father wouldn't let me go.

I: Ohh!

V: I cried and cried and cried. I think I must have been 16 at the time. So umm when I went to college, my, my father was a one track mind. He {070} you're gonna go to college, you're going to college, you're not going to have a social life. So one time I was invited to a Greek home on a Sunday and uhh there was a young man there who was very much interested in me.

I: Hmm.

V: But I wasn't interested in him and we were having lunch and around this big table was a couple from Vallejo, California. So the next weekend when I went home to Benicia to visit because I got a ride out with a, a Greek man and his wife umm in their car I would, they would pick me up {075} in a {075} and they would take me there. This Greek man went to see his mother and father in Benicia and he was a very wonderful businessman, very nice man. And what happened was that I walked into the house and said hello and all and finally my father said, "I thought you were going to college. Now I hear you're gonna get married."

I: <gasps>

V: And that came from the man, the men were the biggest gossips. That came from the man that was at the luncheon with his wife in San Francisco because they saw me at that home where that young man lived. So I said no, I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." He said, "Ohh we, so and so saw you in, having lunch and there was this young man in that {082}. The son of the people in that house." But anyway my father was very proud of me when he came down to see me at graduation.

I: Graduation from?

V: Uhh San Francisco Teacher's College, State Teacher's College.

I: Umm.

V: Graduation was at the Opera House.

I: Opera House! And your mother and father came?

V: That's right. All the way from Benecia.

I: Ok. Ceremony, now you were valedictorian for high school//

V: I was valedictorian uh that selected to be valedictorian. I graduated, I was graduated magnum cum laude <laughing> M-A-G, anyway. So umm, I umm, I'm sure there were other people that had higher grades maybe or equal grades but somehow or other I was selected to be the valedictorian.

I: What do you think your drive came from, what was your drive to//

V: //My, my drive?

I: Yes.

V: My drive was that same old thing about showing the people, that Greek people really were wonderful, were just as intelligent and umm productive as any other ethnic group. That all came from my fourth grade experience as the white bread.

I: <sighing> What type of bread do you eat in your house right now?

V: {095}

I: <laughing>

V: My husband's favorite is sourdough French and I love a lot of whole wheat bread <mumbling>

I: Ohh <laughing>

V: But we don't eat spongy, white bread.

I: Nope, <laughing> I didn't think so <laughing>

V: We don't need American {098} and French bread.

I: Ohh umm have you umm umm let's see. Did we get your four children's ages and uhh well the three children's//

V: //uhh they were talking//

I: //I know. Did we get the dates of their births?

V: Umm you got the date of my birth. My children, and my three children, two girls and a boy//

I: //Ok.

V: {102} Pat is the first one, {103} Barbara is the second one, and umm James, named after his father, Demitrios or James, umm is the third one. And I wanted to tell you that uhh my mother-in-law *really* was hurt that I didn't name my son after her husband. But she had two other grandchildren named after my father-in-law, when my first daughter, our first daughter was born, {108} named after my mother-in-law, and my mother said, "That's ok, let her have the name that your mother-in-law's insisting on." So when I, we named, I told, I was very much in love with my husband, respected him highly and I said, "Nope, we're going to name him James after you." That, she went around to my relatives and told them how terrible I was and uhh so, my uncle, with whom I'd lived, my aunt and uncle, when Barbara was born, the second one, I said, "Uncle Jim," I said, "you know, I've had so much trouble with names, my mother-in-law wants every child named after her and her husband." I said, "Can you help me?" I said, "Let's pick out a name nobody has." And that's how we landed on Barbara, Barbara <in Greek accent>

I: {115}

V: So anyway, my children are in their fifties.

I: Ok.

V: Cuz Patricia is umm supervisor of uhh welfare and, and attendance with South San Francisco Schools. My daughter, Barbara, is in Colorado and she is a very fine designer and umm at Tipton Homes and decorator.

I: Mmhmm.

V: And she has a degree in Graphic Arts and Pat has an administrating credential as well as her teaching credentials and master's degrees in three areas. And our son has a degree in uhh from University of California, Davis. One in Art and one in History and he's done very well as an artist. Of course, since 19-, 9/11 things are pretty bad.

I: Ok.

V: So he's doing odd jobs but uhh the kids are artistic. Uhh later on you'll see, I asked my son to do me a uhh a geometric figures in the colors I had in the living room, you'll see them later. And I thought of Barbara, the desk, this work on the fireplace thing//

I: //Ohh//

V: //she puts the tissue paper with charcoal drawings and then this is an electric needle on how to temper glass to come out with a design.

I: Ok.

V: So the kids are all artistic.

I: I see.

V: And umm, see my side of the family is all in the humanities.

I: Yeah.

V: My uncle made, used to tell us all of these have fables in Greek. And my mother would have been a perfect schoolteacher, she taught us to do a lot of things: embroidery, everything. And uhh on my husband's side they're all business. Of course, the money is in the business end, not in the humanities.

I: Ohh it sounds artistic, I think he built this house, maybe?

V: My husband?

I: Husband?

V: My husband, yes.

I: Yeah.

V: He was good at the builders. He and I spent on Saturdays, uhh we taught our children to do, clean their own rooms, everybody learned how to wash dishes, floors and my son wanted one shirt that he loved. I said, "James, I've got twelve shirts every week for you for the next week." "But mom I like this one." I said, "Good, honey, you're 14

let me show you how to wash and dry and iron." And so he was a quite a boy scout, he used to cook meals out in the yard, in the ground, in the hole, potatoes and all the rest of the meat in silver foil. And they, they were all, the girls and even our son, uhh had very good hosts, hosts {138} they all three are excellent cooks.

I: Any of them playing softball, hardball, tennis?

V: They did in high school, my son was quite a water polo player.

I: Ok.

V: And uhh our daughters played tennis in high school//

I: //And//

V: //but not now, they're all busy working.

I: I guess they didn't want you to be their coach, did they?

V: Well our daughter, our daughter skies a lot//

I: //Uh huh//

V: //and my son skied a lot, Barbara and James skied a lot.

I: Uh huh. How about you?

V: No.

I: No?

V: No skiing.

I: Mmhmm. Umm so//

V: //they're, they're, they're fine, they're working. Umm I, our, as I said, our son umm with the artwork has done very well. Umm one time we were in the umm Crown Plaza in New York and I said there's one of James's paintings.

I: <gasps>

V: And that's right, and umm one of a kind French, quite large, about eight feet, uhh about six feet across and umm, two and a half feet in perpendicular. And it was all a, a bursting with color, like flowers.

I: Mmhmm.

V: And umm that was his, he sold to corporations and banks and airports and you have to know that in the art field umm the gallery that sold for him, cuz an artist has to work, he can't go out and get the sales, so umm the umm the gallery that sold for him liked a lot of his work went for \$16,000 he got \$8,000.

I: Right.

V: And, of course, right now he's trying to do it all on his own because he can't afford to have a person selling so he's tryin' to sell through the internet and he's umm, not afraid to come down off his pedestal and umm paint houses//

I: //Ohh//

V: //and do other things.

I: Uhh are you on the computer at all?

V: No, I'm not into computers, that's. I have a word processor and a printer and I did all my uhh travel writing on that. And uhh all my charity work on that and then umm I'm still with the Hellenic Professional Society and I've done all the {161} award material. But I just decided that I'd relax, as far as getting in faxes, I pick 'em up down the road here.

I: Mmhmm.

V: And uhh I decided that I wouldn't go into that, I needed to relax a little more.

I: Are you umm//

V: //don't forget now, I'm in my mid 80's and I thought well, my {164} my body doesn't always follow.

I: Ok <laughing> Umm are you uhh Greek Orthodox?

V: Am I what?

I: Greek Orthodox?

V: Yes, I was umm, I have a very interesting history about religion. I was baptized in a galvanized tub by a priest who came from umm San Francisco, he'd come to Benecia and baptize the children. And the mothers would have their gath-, their galvanized uhh tub and we would be baptized in that in our homes. And umm so my father said, "Well we should all have some religious training." There was no Greek church in Benecia so we went to Episcopal Church.

I: Ok//

V: //and even, even when my father died and I went back home for the funeral umm the priest at the Episcopal Church let us have a Greek liturgy funeral service at the uh Episcop al church. I was also president of Christian Endeavor when I was 17. Christian Endeavor was in the Congregational Church. Now all of us, Portuguese, Irish, uh I was the only Greek one in the club//

I: //Ok//

V: //Umm we all met at the Christian Endeavor at the Congregational Church because the pastor invited us there. And we had wonderful times in our meetings. We belonged to Christian Endeavor.

I: Hmm.

V: And I also belonged to Campfire Girls.

I: Ok.

V: And I sold umm Campfire Girls candy and I won uh, I was a great seller, I won uh two times, two years in a row 30-day pass to all the movies in the theatre, in a little town. And uh then umm I, the Greek church has always been with me. Umm.

I: Ok.

V: Since I was umm even when we married in Pittsburgh we raised money for the Greek church in Pittsburgh, California. We raised money for umm Saint Nicholas Church in San Jose and we've raised money and helped build a church uh when we moved in 1955 to {188}.

I: Now umm we're checking the tapes. It's ok, the tapes fine, oh, I see. If, what values from your Greek background would you like to pass on?

V: With my what?

I: From your Greek background, what values, from your Greek background, would you like to pass on?

V: My values have passed on to my children.

I: Ok.

V: That, they're great people should be very proud of their heritage, not only for the fact that our government here was uh patterned after the Greek government but also for umm what our families have brought in and that is that the families that came in at the

time of my parents brought in umm a lot of good morals. They may have been strict but umm they wanted us to behave well in school, to never get into trouble. And it's amazing to my husband now as he reads in Greek-American newspapers about a Greek man murdering his wife, for example. My husband still cannot accept that a person of the Greek heritage would do something like that. And I keep telling him, "People are people regardless of what ethnic group they belong to." So umm my children are very proud, very proud that their parents, their grandparents, their heritage, and we umm believe that umm a great many wonderful things came from the time of Herakles and uhh we are just pleased with everything we've had, that we've gotten from our parents and grandparents.

I: Ok and what values from the American heritage would you pass on?

V: Uhh from the American heritage, democracy, liberty, the opportunity, umm being able to work if you want to and being able to be a writer, an artist and a poet. And the freedom, uhh nothing is free, but there is, by freedom I mean you have the opportunity to pursue your dream and to uhh I believe strongly that in order to, I'm not genius, but I believe that a genius is a person who not only has a high mental ability but he gives back to his community. And all of my three children have done that in high school. Our son was not eligible for a scholarship based on need. However, we were shocked at graduation when he was given a check for \$500 for all the work he had done for the black community in East Palo Alto. For the {224} in Redwood City and the work he had done in the high school. And umm our daughters have been umm honored umm. My honor Pat received the Golden Apple from South San Francisco, the city of South San Francisco for all that she had done to help other people and the same for Barbara, she's helped a lot. So uhh I think maybe my husband and I were role models in that while we were working to achieve our own financial goals, we gave to the community.

I: Mmhmm.

V: We, we made contributions to both the Greek community and the non-Greek community. My husband gave a great deal of his life to the world, our life foundation that he belongs to and uhh to, he's an ethical hunter, and that's a long story to explain that. But he has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for saving wildlife throughout the world. And umm I've given a lot and my children have given a lot. So we taught them, at least they, they modeled after us that not only do you pursue your own career but you also give back to the community.

I: Is there anything else//

V: //Well I was just going to say//

I: //you would like to say//

V: //you asked me about my non-Greek life.

I: Yeah, ok//

V: //Let me just tell you that when I went back to work in 1955 I also was a member of the University Club at Stanford because I was going to pursue my studies there while I was married, three children and a husband who required a lot of dinner parties for his businesses.

I: Mmhmm.

V: Business. And so I became umm a chairman of the historical aspect of the society and the social aspect. Uhh by that I don't mean parties, I mean writing and about things that were happening in the community. And at the end of the year, when I finished my term of office I was elected to become state chairman of the University Clubs for umm History. And I had to refuse//

I: //Mmhmm//

V: //but I took a good look at what I had. And I had a wonderful husband, three children and all the energy that God gave me to pursue my career and still leave my husband as master of the house and do all his umm entertaining for his business. And so I had to refuse//

I: //Mmhmm//

V: //I said I, I couldn't do it, I had to, I was obligated to my family. And that was the same thing that was the reason that I didn't pursue my Ph.D. at Stanford. Umm one of the things was that I had done a research, two years of weekends and weeks and weeks of testing where I would, in the 60's you would have to understand, women, girls who were academically ahead were considered not to be any good in Physical Education. And so I went to San Jose State while I was working in Palo Alto, while I was going to Stanford, uhh taking courses on a part-time basis in the summer, uhh for my master's degree. I went to San Jose State, I took night courses in how to do proper testing and I tested 32 academically bright girls who had taken all the state tests in academics and they were up to 99 percentile and I took 32 'C' average girls. I checked all their records in the health department, I had the nurse do it for me. I tested them in ten physical activities. I put all this together, I studied at Stanford Library, I studied all about Termin {276} and his guinea pigs, people that he had pursued to see what happened to academically-bright people. I put the whole thing together, believe me, if I spent, there was no copy service in those days. I spent \$250 to have copies made, typed, everything typed up. {281} was quite thick, the manuscript, double-spaced. I turned it into my mentor, Dr. McDaniels for whom I had done a lot of case studies, I had also done a study on laws pertaining to children and it was, he asked me to get the paper to two of the low classes. So he took my manuscript and when I went in for an evaluation he said he had given it to Dr. Nixon, who was in charge of Special Ed. And he said, "You know, that, that manuscript is for 16 quarter units," he said, "most, let me know show you what most people turn in for a master's degree. And all you need is two quarter units."

I: Mmhmm.

V: So mine, but he said it was worth 16 and he could use 14 of those for a doctorate. And he said, I said, "Well, where's the manuscript?" And he said, "Oh." By the way, the manuscript was, I did it during the time of Kennedy, John Kennedy, who was promoting Physical Education and everybody had to have physical ed through the senior year. Today they don't, we're getting to be, becoming obese.

I: Yes.

V: So I had these beautiful, beautiful colored charts, there was no way to reproduce them. So I included them in my original, I kept the copy of the manuscript but no colored charts and about six colored charts and it had to do with physical ed. Nixon had my work and Dr. McDaniel, my mentor, said, "Go get the manuscript from him." So when I got up to Dr. Nixon {304} office, I said, "Dr. Nixon." And he said, "Oh you must be Virginia Lagiss." And I said, "Yes." He said, "Oh, what a beautiful manuscript you have." He said, "I'm going to publish it." And I said umm, "You're gonna what?" And he said, and I was very tired because the week, my last week I took three exams in one day at Stanford and my sister-in-law with three children had come to live at our house because she had had some problems and I was cooking//

END OF SIDE B {313}

END OF INTERVIEW

Notes:

Side A

{001}: Maiden name

{013}: Name of the Creamery

{018}: Where in Greece?

{025}: Name of town

{038}: Name spelling

{040}: Spelling

{041}: Village name

{075}: Name of first brother

{121}: Supervisor's name

{134}: Whose wedding?

{140}: Name of roommate

{179}: Helped sister got to which school?

{216}: What in Palo Alto High School?

{277/290}: Where was Camp Roberts?

{318}: Mother's village name?

{331/332}: Woman who organized the forerunner to Philoptochos?

{336}: Whose house?

Side B

{003}: Organization name
{006}: Women's names
{009}: Amanda's surname
{010}: Kokas spelling?
{024}: Skouras Brothers spelling
{035}: Name spelling
{042}: Name spelling
{055}: Name spelling
{102}: Pat's Greek name
{103}: Barbara's Greek name
{276}: Termin spelling? Name of the scientist